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Feminist Thought as a Perspective for Discussing Social Pedagogy¹

Abstract

Feminism as a philosophical concept is a general reflection on gender issues and women's conditions. Since the 70s of the 20th century feminism has become an alternative way of creating knowledge from women's perspective. The author notices that in Poland, unlike the West, feminist thought has not been treated with respect. She explains what the feminist theory is and then analyses the connections between feminist thought and social pedagogy; for both of them the essential categories are: engagement and empowerment. Applying the feminist perspective allows to examine the earlier periods of development of social pedagogy, especially its beginnings, and to discover women's presence in the public sphere and their participating in developing socio-pedagogical thought.

Key Words: *feminism, feminist theory, social pedagogy, women's presence, empowerment, epistemology*

¹ This text includes parts of a book by E. Górnikowska-Zwolak, titled as the article, edited by Wydawnictwo Górnośląskiej Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej im. kard. A. Hłonda, Mysłowice 2006. The paper was published (in Polish) as: *Feministyczne inspiracje dla rozwoju pedagogiki społecznej* [Feminist inspiration for the development of Social Pedagogy]. In: *Fenomen nierówności społecznych* [The Phenomenon of Social Inequalities]. Ed. by J. Klebaniuk. ENETEIA Wydawnictwo Psychologii i Kultury. Warszawa 2007. However, the English version enables the English speaking readers to learn about quite a new and important perspective for discussing social pedagogy.

Introduction

One of the most important changes of our times is that in women's lives and consciousness, a new vision of social life that is connected with this change has developed. In Manuel Castells' opinion feminist activity (in the last four decades of the 20th century), which has led to the emergence of a new awareness of the subjectivity of women, can be rated amongst the most important social revolutions which took place on our planet (or at least in parts of it – EG-Z).

In the West the feminist theory is currently considered as significant, and is still the principal life force of this most fascinating and expanding undertaking (Kaschack, 1996, 13). But meanwhile in Poland feminism, or more broadly, the issues of cultural gender identity – has problems in establishing a path for itself and enjoys popularity only amongst limited groups of people. On the one hand, the establishment of interdisciplinary women studies at universities is a very optimistic development. Also within university environments there are more and more teams researching into the general area of gender. The number of conferences organised is a very positive sign. But on the other hand, when we listen to the main currents of serious debates carried on by scholars, as well as discussions conducted by spokespeople, and writers we cannot find much feminism amongst the most socially significant topics. It looks as if feminism did not exist in the perception of those who speak loudest in public. Zbyszko Melosik and Tomasz Szkudlarek observed that: "Something which does not exist in the perception patterns of such people simply does not exist for them – either as a problem or as a challenge" (Melosik, Szkudlarek, 1998, p. 60). Hardly anyone anywhere thinks and speaks about feminism as a coherent system of ideas and social postulates. Feminism encounters silence and even if someone talks about it – they do so indulgently, ironically, mistrustfully². In journalism feminism is treated as peripheral to public life³. What is more, we often find out that this phenomenon (feminism) is alien to mainstream Polish culture.

² At the same time the circle of scholars is enlarging. These scholars, not related with feminism in any of its aspects, study gender issues in the fields of biology, psychology, sociology, history, pedagogy, cultural studies and others.

³ Very characteristic here is the review of press texts, published in the first decade of III RP and taken from 41 magazines. The author of this review – Paweł Śpiewak – entitled it *Spór o Polskę 1989–1999 (A Dispute about Poland)* and distinguished 9 sections devoted to different topics: I – The birth of Polish democracy; II – Poland in Europe; III – The heritage and the memory of communism; IV – Polish democracy. The left wing – the right wing; V – Church, religion, democracy; VI – Nationalism, anti-Semitism, patriotism, tolerance; VII – New society. The dispute over intelligence, the middle class, Polish identity; VIII – Polish reforms, Polish capitalism; IX – The myth of Wałęsa, the myth of "Solidarity". As we can see none of these titles refers to feminism or, more generally, to the issue of women, though in three of them the term

Why the woman issue is underrepresented in academic discourse: Criticism of masculinized epistemology

It is well-known that for a long time social sciences failed to recognise women as a specific social category which could, or even should, be an autonomous subject of study. According to Anthony Giddens: “No-one can really deny the fact that the majority of former sociological analyses did not include women at all or showed their identity and behaviour in a highly inadequate way” (Giddens, 2004, p. 691). This was the result of accepting a certain model of learning. Based on the model of cognition that existed in the natural sciences, society was analysed as objectively existing, collective creation. Researchers concentrated on finding rules that were responsible for its functioning and development. From this – macro-social – point of view, social phenomena were perceived only in the public sphere (Szacka, 2003). Researches were focused on those who played official, noticeable and dramatic roles. For example, sociology in the US and GB before 1970 was absorbed mainly by public life matters, like: work, production, the class system and religion – things significant from a man’s point of view. But when it came to private matters and things important to women such as the family, housework, motherhood, the role of emotion and sexuality – matters that were unofficial and thus invisible, they were omitted⁴.

At the beginning of the 1970s important changes began. Firstly, the scientific model of cognition started to lose popularity, and, at the same time, orientations connected with an interaction perspective started to gain it. Secondly, ideologies and feminist movements developed, and not only did they embrace matters of social inequality connected with gender but also started to promote the need for rebuilding science (male creation) and demanded the inclusion and acceptance of a feminist perspective and feminist methodologies in social studies (Szacka, 2003, p. 348).

democracy appears (but apparently it is not associated with women). There were 222 authors of the texts, which were chosen for this book, but there were only 20 women (9%) among them.

⁴ Because of that, feminists claim that there is a need to develop a new sociology of knowledge, which will embrace all aspects of women’s experiences. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise are protagonists of “sociology of life from the inside” (*fag sociology, sociology without balls*) whose methods derive from ethno-methodology and which concentrates on women’s personal everyday activities rather than on the social structure. M. Humm: *Słownik teorii feminizmu...*, p. 221. A good example of such cultivation of sociology can be found in the works of: Helen Lopata: *Occupation: Housewife*. Oxford University Press, New York 1971; Ann Oakley: *Woman’s Work: The Housewife, Past and Present*. Pantheon, New York 1974; A. Oakley: *Housewife: A Sociological Study of Domestic Labour and Child-rearing*. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1976.

These criticisms of existing forms of knowledge had one main aim – to show how, and to what extent, women's lives, their views and their world perception were ignored by existing social science disciplines. It was accepted that the scientific world either omitted women, assuming that their experiences were the same as men's (thus gender was not considered as an important criterion of analysis), or treated them as differing from the norm. This criticism of male-oriented knowledge was initiated, especially in GB, in the social sciences (firstly by psychologists).

Feminism looks critically at the whole tradition of cognition, including science as a highly patriarchal discipline. Feminist epistemology loudly criticises any kind of male domination, and the recognised and blatant male bias in the history and contemporary practise of cognition. The whole complex of methods set up by modern science is being criticised, especially in the field of natural history and its established positivism and neo-positivist methodology, but also the view of the methodological relationships enforced by science (Miluska, 1994).

Catherine MacKinnon, a well-known American lawyer, claims that: '[...] men create the world based on their points of view which are (according to them) dominant "general truths" and they use these to describe the world [...]. A male epistemological claim [...] is objectivity: seemingly a detached view, a distant look without any perspective, which allegedly does not alter the reality. Man does not recognise it however as his own perspective, nor does he see that in the way he understands the world he submits it to himself *a priori* and says how it should look" (MacKinnon, 1982, pp. 23–24).

Feminists have sceptical attitudes towards the possibility of neutral descriptions of the core of the social world. First and foremost they indicate that the **supposed objectivity of male terminology is a sham, because of its partiality and ignorance of the issue of gender**. Both feminists and critics unsympathetic to feminism, doubt if there is anything like an objective understanding, or any possibility of acquiring the objective 'truth'. This impossibility comes from the fact that the researcher always works within a specific social context, so seemingly unimportant or treated as obvious, the researcher's total experience is always represented in his/her questions, his/her answers and interpretations⁵. Therefore one should openly

⁵ As confirmation of the fact that the cultural experience of a researcher is reflected in questions asked by them or in their interpretations, here is a good example: Piotr Sztompka in his academic book titled *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa* (Wydawnictwo "Znak", Kraków 2002) prepared a test checking the understanding of sociological terms. One of the questions is: "The rule that we greet a friend by taking off our hat is an example of: a) moral norm, b) legal norm, c) anomaly, d) alienation, e) customary cultural convention" (p. 629). The author did not pay attention to the fact that women, if they wear a hat, do not take it off while greeting. So

admit to these prejudices rather than seek to deny their existence within research results (Mainard, 1995; Kowalczyk, 2001).

What is feminist theory for and what is it concerned about?

Feminist theory is a term which in many studies is used interchangeably with other terms such as: feminist studies/ feminist research, a theory of the feminist movement or just plain feminism. In fact – as Ewa Gontarczyk says – they are connected with one another in a particular way (Gontarczyk, 1995).

In defining feminist theory, firstly, we have to focus on how much attention it pays to women's experiences but also what goals it seeks to accomplish. **Feminist theory** in an absolutely fundamental way is **concerned with women's experience**. Its subject of research is concerned both with women's past and women's present. Utilising explanations from economics, religion and political theory – or sometimes rejecting them – feminism turns a spotlight on previously hidden aspects of women's lives. Women's experience is defined as a woman's personal consciousness and knowledge, both formed by taking part in public life. In the literature of this subject much attention is paid to the fact that the meaning of women's experiences is often underestimated and women's experiences are not considered to be "real experiences". Much attention is also paid to the dissonance between women's experiences and theoretical schemes which are offered to women as a tool to organise their experiences (Smith, 1974). In this situation a task for feminism is to transform private, personal problems and women's experiences into issues of a social dimension; issues which will be seen in public life. Feminism claims that personal, direct experiences have a political character and play a great role in political activity (Humm, 1993). The unique thing about feminism is that it pays attention to the inseparability of categories treated, until now, as dichotomous and these are: public and private spheres, theory and practice, knowledge and politics and mind and body.

When it comes to the main aim of feminist theory, what is underlined most often is understanding the oppression of women in such categories as race, class, gender and sexual preferences – and debating how to change these situations. Feminism highlights the meaning of women's individual and common experiences and their struggle for emancipation. So, if this theory is based on an assumption that it will help women's emancipation (and that is the basic assumption of it), it means that it

he treated his male (particular) gender experience as a universal one, offering it to all readers, regardless of the gender (female/male).

is a realistic way of studying women. It is assumed that a certain theory is feminist as long as it can be used for questioning, opposing or changing any *status quo*, which deprives and devaluates women (Gontarczyk, 1995).

Janet Chafetz distinguishes **three elements of feminist theory**. The first is that gender is the main subject of this theory or, in other words, the main interest is concentrated on gender. Feminist theory tries to explain the character of all relationships, institutions and processes that are connected with gender. The **second element** refers to the fact that gender relations are seen principally as a problem. It means that feminist theory tries to understand in what way gender is connected with inequalities, tensions and social contradictions. The **third, and last element** is that relationships connected with sex are not considered to be natural and unchangeable, but rather as creation formed by socio-cultural and historical processes. The inequalities of gender are seen as being constantly recreated by human activities and therefore can be changed by different human activities (Chafetz, 1988)⁶.

Convergence of feminist thought and social pedagogy

When we analyse the basis of feminist theory we come to the conclusion that there is a very strong convergence between feminist research and research conducted in the field of social pedagogy. Zbigniew Kwieciński notices that the goal of social pedagogy is to empower every person in every community, to facilitate beneficial development (whilst strongly opposing subordination and structural and symbolic “rape”). The aims and content of social pedagogic research are to

⁶ It is considered a little bit differently by the historian Linda Gordon who speaks of the minimum of feminism and defines feminist conduct; this reflects at the same time the constitutive elements of feminism and feminist theory in general. And so three components are recognised. The first one is the conviction that the woman's status is not determined by divine or biological factors but it is created by people within a culture, and it can be changed by people. The second is the belief that the woman's status today is unsatisfactory. The third is that of general political activities whose aim is to improve this status. So we can see three synchronic surfaces here: intellectual (the belief in the origins of the woman's status), emotional-evaluation (admitting that it is unsatisfactory) and political (activities having a political character). Bożena Umińska and Jarosław Mikos draw attention to the fact that very often the component which should be political becomes ideological. At the same time they underline the fact that in the majority of important feminist works it is not the ideology that is the most noticeable part in the feminist theory, but the intellectual description – solid and innovative. This description is accompanied by emotional involvement and particular political status, and that, in science, it is considered to be a revolutionary innovation. Cf. M. Humm: *Słownik teorii feminizmu...*, pp. 4–5.

empower people throughout their lives according to what is considered a desirable life. Kwieciński defines this axiological orientation as an overwhelming concern for people's welfare, especially of "those at the bottom of society". This is a constant reassertion of the right of every person to improvement in all aspects of their life (Kwieciński, 2001, p. 28).

This sub-discipline (as well as in the study of feminist theory) is characterised by humanist pragmatism and not by any soulless scientism. Academic knowledge coexists and is connected with morality and should find a place in activities which help and support individuals and communities (Kwieciński, 2001)⁷.

As in feminist research **the basis of social pedagogy is involvement**. Tadeusz Pilch, pointing to the philosophical basis of social pedagogy, reminds us that it has grown out of ideas that consider intellectual cognition useless unless it works actively supporting and complementing it with thought and determination. A scholar should be involved both emotionally and actively. Rational observation and involvement and humanity is the duty of any scholar or researcher who wishes to change a social environment. Pilch judges knowledge, created by scholars, as effective as long it is a means of change, in particular of positive change.

What is crucial in distinguishing social pedagogy from feminist theory, with the exception of identifying the researcher (female), is that feminist research focuses on women's experience as the largest social category treated unequally with men; they focus on the oppression that women have to face because of their gender. Using the terminology that appears in social pedagogy we should say that "those at the bottom" are women and their unequal treatment should not be ignored by involved researchers. So women must be empowered. The possibility of developing individual abilities to enhance their lives (according to their own wishes), should be assured, allowing them to participate fully in all social and political areas of life.

Insight into social pedagogy from a feminist perspective – and what appears from that?

Everyone who tries to describe the world needs bases their understanding of it on various assumptions. One needs theories or a conceptual start to begin this process. Such a theory, as Zbyszko Melosik observed, cannot include everything.

⁷ T. Pilch writes: "Paraphrasing B. Pascal's words we can say that pedagogy is »immersed in morality«. So each pedagogic act is involved in conditioning and necessities coming from the gist of human relationships, coming from special character of human nature as a value in itself and superior in comparison with other subjects of human activity" (Pilch, 1999, 38)

We cannot see the world in all its diversity, simultaneously. A discussion that is good for one community is not necessarily good for another because it can work as a repressive mechanism towards some aspects of a community or to the community in its entirety (Melosik, 2002).

At the same time each new theory can be a pretext for the relativization of its own assumptions, knowledge and beliefs. While “entering” the languages offered us by various discourses, we can see the wealth of meanings concerning the world in which we live. There is no doubt that feminist discourse can successfully enlarge this world of meanings and so enlarge social pedagogy.

If we follow the discourse about the current condition of social pedagogy and its development perspectives, which have been circulating amongst teachers and academics ceaselessly since the 1990s, we can see that a few very important matters are raised frequently. First, the idea of building a contemporary self-knowledge of the discipline is repeated because all pedagogy requires self-analysis – it should be a subject in itself and a subject of deeper thought, but a more theoretically-methodological analysis is necessary (Chmielowski, 1999; Piekarski, 1999; Urbaniak-Zajac, 1999). Second and connected with the first case, further studies on the genesis of social pedagogy, with its social-historical “roots” are needed. Jacek Piekarski states that such studies can deliver interesting knowledge about the changing bases of the theory and methodology of the discipline. These studies can also indicate changes which are happening in the proposed concepts of social order, ideas about institutions and ideas relating to the social participation of individuals, so it is affecting contemporary problems which are a matter of concern to many researchers at present (Piekarski, 1999). Bogusław Chmielowski agrees with this point of view and says that it is essential to eliminate unknown areas of knowledge which refer to previous periods of development of the discipline (both before and since the Second World War). Time and distance can be very useful tools for self-examination. Third, social pedagogy should strive to develop its own theories and use also the contemporary findings of many other disciplines, such as: psychology, sociology (including the sociology of education), economics and social politics. The faster the connection of this pedagogy with a stream of broadly understood concepts and theories of other social sciences is reached, the bigger the chances of meeting current expectations will be” – Tadeusz Lewowicki has written. This statement acknowledges that many research problems are shared with other social sciences, and not only pedagogy researchers, but so also economists, lawyers, psychologists, sociologists and many others are interested in them. The need to conduct interdisciplinary research is becoming widely acknowledged now, requiring methods and techniques previously not typical of pedagogy (Szymański, 1999).

When using a feminist idea it is my intention to enlarge the field of pedagogic discussion as well as deepen knowledge about previous periods of development. As the eminent Polish sociologist – Stefan Nowak – states: “At the basis of scientific development, especially turning points in social sciences, we can usually find some new philosophical ideas, new ontological models of studied phenomena, and a fundamental revision of our attitudes towards them. These philosophical ideas and ontological models are peculiar probes sent by human thought to discover unknown areas or those that seek a new approach. New ontological and axiological ideas of the human world, human phenomena and things surrounding us, suggest premises to new questions and methods to answer these questions” (Nowak, 1994, p. 37). Feminist thought can be, without any doubt, perceived – in Nowak’s words – as a probe sent to re-examine research fields of social pedagogy. Many of these fields deserve a totally new approach.

Feminism as a philosophical concept is general reflection on gender issues and women’s conditions. This concept develops an interpretation of reality (description, explanation and judgement) and it manages to do that by including neglected, until now, issues of gender and the contrast between traditional knowledge and feminism which is absent in historical enquiry. Feminism is becoming an alternative way of creating knowledge from women’s perspectives. Let us remind ourselves that it considers not only research on women and the analysis and interpretation of femininity and masculinity, but also all major issues, which can be seen from women’s perspective (Gontarczyk, 1995). Including feminist thought in social pedagogy provides opportunities for meeting the challenges raised in the debate on change therein, such as the chance for deeper studies on the origins of this subject.

The issue of the presence of women in public life is very interesting and the participation of women in the development of social-pedagogical thought is paralleled by their absence in the study of social pedagogy. Recognition of this issue is at the same time an attempt to eliminate unknown areas in our knowledge (and / or in our consciousness) about the previous periods of development of this discipline. In this place it is good to stop for a moment and return to the discussion about the beginnings of social pedagogy in Poland, during which the idea appeared that the context in which Polish social pedagogy was formed was specific⁸. But apart from that, the idea has appeared that the beginnings of the discipline were similar

⁸ Those specific socio-cultural condition sprang from the influence of such factors as: 1) Poland’s regaining independence and lively slogans of national independence, 2) The hard economic situation which bred expectations of social change, 3) The need to build and reform the education system in a revived Poland (Cichosz, 2003).

everywhere– it was the reaction to the problems of an industrialising society. In fact, these ideas do not exclude each other. I would like, however, to consider during my analysis of this first period of the development of social pedagogy that representatives of both ideas seem not to have noticed the impact of the sexual revolution on social and educational activities.

Let us remind ourselves that the inter-war period was a time of dynamic changes in almost all the spheres of social life. We should look for their genesis in the period before World War I. From the 1870s Western Europe entered the second stage of industrial development⁹. In addition to this technical progress almost all traditional patterns of public and private life were redefined. From the beginning of the 20th century another revolution developed, often forgotten nowadays but not less important than the first one – that of changing moralities (Marcinkowska-Gawin, 1997).

Daniel Bell, in one of the classic books of contemporary sociology, gives three characteristic keywords for the social ferment which spread throughout the whole Europe and United States during the first 15 years of the 20th century. These words are: “new”, “sex” and “emancipation”. The term “new” was commonly used by the moralists, politicians, educators, artists, engineers and technicians. A “new” morality appeared as well as a “new” style, a “new” upbringing and “new” democracy. It was the first time in European history that the word “new” claiming equality with the traditional had become a source of authority (Bell, 1994, p. 98).

When we reflect on these terms in social pedagogy there is no doubt when we refer to the former one (“new”). In the literature of the subject it is commonly agreed that the ideas of the New Upbringing Movement, vividly discussed also in Poland, was an important inspiration for social pedagogy. The personal contacts and involvement of Helena Radlińska, who in the 1930s became the chairwoman of the Polish Section of New Upbringing League, were very important from this point of view. Also important was the concept of spiritual powers accepted by Radlińska, which seems to be very similar and was inspired by the concept of powers accepted by the New Upbringing League (Cichosz, 2003).

The second key-word, mentioned by Bell, was “sex”. In Protestant countries the discovery of sexuality as the basic factor of the human condition was connected with a fierce attack on a rigorous and restraining puritanical culture. In 1913 American Margaret Sanger came up with the term: “birth control” and the Swedish feminist Ellen Key claimed that marriage should not be a matter of economic compulsion but of free choice. Emma Goldman, an anarchist, gave lectures on homosexuality and the “third sex”. Before 1914 the biggest European movement

⁹ The first stage (1780–1840) was the forerunner of the second one.

for sexual emancipation existed in Berlin. During that time also, in Vienna, Sigmund Freud worked out his theory of the sub-conscious. He studied neurosis and hysteria, pointing out that childhood can influence the further positive or negative development of mankind (Marcinkowska-Gawin, 1997).

Support for this sexual revolution came to Poland quickly, amazingly quickly, considering it was a peripheral and economically backward East-Central European country. In fact we can talk about two paces of modernisation. On the one hand, when we talk about industrialisation, urbanisation and the development of educational systems, Poland was far behind the rich and well-developed countries of Western Europe. But on the other hand, when we talk about cultural modernisation in the sense of intellectual changes, sympathy for change developed widely amongst the intellectual elite. Not simply birth control, but the wider moral health of society, was raised by progressive liberal-intellectuals, who gathered around "Wiadomości Literackie" (Literary News). Unbelievably courageous texts (not only for those times) were written by, among others, Zofia Nałkowska, but most of all, by Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy and Irena Krzywicka. Many publications, some by female authors about a morally-based social order, had appeared even before Poland achieved independence. Eliza Orzeszkowa wrote about women's moral self-education and the necessity of creating educational communities to achieve it. Among important authors there were: Waleria Marrene-Morzkowska, Iza Moszczeńska, Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska, Kazimiera Bujwidowa. These writings did not become, however, the ideological basis of social pedagogy (in contrast to Edward Abramowski's utopian theory of moral revolution, which was for Radlińska a source of deep reflection on the basis of nurture).

The sexual revolution aroused a lot of controversy because it interfered with privacy and with mankind's everyday life about which little was known then. The revolution touched the most important institution of social life – the family, so in fact it touched upon the mutual relationships between husband and wife and between parent and child. It spoke of eroticism and man's sexuality as the issues of intellectual and social importance. This sexual revolution did not, however, transfer to the political plane (Marcinkowska-Gawin, 1997).

The third term, closely related to the first two, is "emancipation", which was understood as a protest against current social norms and customs, and against the older generation considered to be bound by a repressive culture. Examples of this protest were the emancipation movements representing various powerless social groups, whose place in society was the result of their material situation or gender. It is not by chance that Anglo-Saxon historiography defines the first two decades of the 20th century as the "new woman's times"; women, who were freed from some legal and cultural restrictions.

It is obvious that changes also in this sphere started much earlier. In Poland, in the 1870s Eliza Orzeszkowa wrote: "One of the widely-discussed ideas in our times is the so-called emancipation of women" (cf.: Chwalba, 1997). That idea started the fight for equal rights for women, a movement which became differentiated over time. We can distinguish a few major currents within this movement: socialist, Christian, liberal-bourgeois, national-democratic, and favouring the sovereignty of a state. Women's representatives in these radical streams: whether socialist, democratic or liberal were called then (or called themselves) variously: "sympathisers", "activists", "enthusiasts", "emancipators", "liberators" and "feminists". Helena Radlińska's statements are considered (by historians) to be representative of the radical movement for women's emancipation¹⁰.

Radlińska's involvement in women's emancipation seems to be understandable if we consider that the people closest to her were also strong supporters. Her mother, Melania, was a journalist co-operating with the women's emancipation movement. Eliza Orzeszkowa and Maria Konopnicka, who were regular visitors to Radlińska's parents' flat in Warsaw, – as Helen recollected after many years – awakened "adoration and admiration" in her¹¹. We have to add also that these two ladies were the most prominent persons in the emancipation movement. In later years Radlińska co-operated with other women, e.g. Stefania Sempołowska, in *Kobiece Koło Oświaty Ludowej* (Women's Circle of Peasants' Education) (Nietyksza, 1995, p. 66). Her husband, a doctor, Zygmunt Radliński was one of those who put his signature to the document inaugurating the activities of *Liga Reformy Obyczajów* (The League of Custom Reform) (The League came into existence in 1933 initiated by Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy). If, however, we study the writings about the creator of social pedagogy – Radlińska – we learn that she was the originator of a folk movement; she was occupied by the growth of education in the country and by the social education of rural youth. But Radlińska's ideological movement in women's

¹⁰ Andrzej Chwalba places Radlińska's name next to those of: Maria Wiśniewska "Turzyna", Kazimiera Bujwidowa, Felicia Nossig-Próchnikowa, Estera Golde-Strozecka, Paulina Kuczalska-Reinshmit, Romana Pachucka, Jadwiga Dziubińska, Maria Siedlecka, Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska, Zofia Moraczewska, Aniela Szycówna, Maria Dulębianka, Józefa Bojanowska, Maria Bieńkówna and also women from Wielkopolska: Gulińska, Thielowa, Kunaczewska, Z. Nowakowa (A. Chwalba: 1997, p. 268).

¹¹ Let us remind ourselves that both Radlińska's parents, Aleksander and Melania Rajchman, belonged to Warsaw's elite and their house played the role of a salon where intellectuals, artists, writers and other culture leaders – people shaping social opinion – met. Among people who were awakening "adoration and admiration" in Helena, next to Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka appeared (in Radlińska's autobiography) also such names as: Henryk Sienkiewicz, publicist Zenon Pietkiewicz writing under a pen name Adam Pług and others (Brodowska-Kubicz, 1996, p. 245–246).

emancipation has been totally eliminated from the later collective memory of the discipline, as has the involvement of many other women who were predecessors and former representatives of social pedagogy¹².

In other words, the emancipation of underprivileged groups, as well as the importance of education as a requirement for the emancipation and democratisation of social life, were very clearly presented during the first stage of the development of social pedagogy, whereas the idea of women's emancipation – the emancipation of people who were particularly socially handicapped – was not part of the debate about social pedagogy (apart from being an important element of the debate on interwar society).

This situation did not change after the War World II. In the consciousness both of society, and themselves women were part of structures, both large and small such as a social class, the workplace staff and the family, but not as social subjects. The totalitarian system deprived individuals of both their individualism and their subjectivity. Social inequalities due to gender inequalities between men and women were not part of the broader social consciousness, so consequently they did not exist in the consciousness of social pedagogues. Changes began to take place only after 1989. Among women, and not only amongst them, the consciousness of basic values started to develop; values that form the social order, values among which the fundamental one is the principle of treating women and men equally. This equality means that women and men should have the same opportunity to develop their potential, and to express their own personalities.

Mirosław Szymański, in drawing together the tasks facing social pedagogy during this transition period, also signalled the need for change in both the research directions and the practices of social pedagogues. He stated that: "Generally speaking, new types of social inequalities are weakly investigated, including the impairment of women in the changing conditions of social life" (Szymański 1999, p. 77). He noticed, moreover, that the new reality makes previous ways of research and their outcomes no more useful. We can only agree and add that not only holistic strategies (taken as a model of cognition), but also theories that try to explain society are losing credibility, and from this viewpoint we try to interpret research results.

Accepting feminist theories and research strategies enables us to complete Szymański's thesis that the impairment of women in a changing society is a new,

¹² In Radlińska's case one of the reasons for this phenomenon was the fact that the author herself perceived the tasks of new sub-discipline and described its curriculum in the context of the needs of contemporary Polish social life, but the critics of these needs were Ludwik Krzywicki and Edward Abramowski who did not include a female perspective.

but barely acknowledged type of inequality. Indeed, the specific impairment of women in certain social conditions (and not only in the conditions which changed after 1989) did not become a research interest of social pedagogues. Only now can we start to be aware that hitherto women were not a mainstream subject of social pedagogy studies.

Translated by *Radosław Zwolak*

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